



JENNIFER LENGYEL-ROYAL

Confidential Intermediary serving the Family Division of the Jackson County 4th Judicial Circuit

23 March, 2010

Representative Lesia Liss
Member of the House Families and Childrens Services Committee
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7514

Dear Representative Liss,

I am writing to thank you and express my appreciation for your sponsorship of House Bills 4006 and 4015, and also to lend my support and encouragement for passage of this fair and equitable bill, which both recognizes and would address the disparities that currently exist in the Michigan Probate Code and Public Health Code, with regard to adult adopted individuals.

While I am not an adoptee or birthparent, I am the granddaughter of an adoptee born in 1921 who, just six months before her death at age 81, was finally able to learn information about her birthparents from surviving family members who were not only receptive to contact, but also extremely warm and welcoming. She was able to find answers... and peace... because her adoption did not fall within Michigan's "Closed Era" and therefore she was able to obtain, from the court that finalized her adoption, a copy of the adoption decree given to her adoptive parents, *which contained the full names of her birthparents and other identifying information.*

I am also the wife of an adopted individual who has been successfully reunited with both sides of his birthfamily, and enjoys close relationships with them. Even though he knows the names and identities of all individuals named on his Original Birth Certificate... and those individuals support his right to have access to his *own* birth certificate – the current law precludes its release.

Additionally, I am a close personal friend of a birthmother who relinquished in 1979. She was never promised – nor did she request – privacy or anonymity. Indeed, being stripped of the right to know what became of her son, and being forced into unwanted confidentiality, served only to instill shame and a sense of utter powerlessness. Furthermore, she received no counseling or advice on how to deal with the feelings of loss and grief that she experienced after relinquishment, other than to “forget about this child” and “go on” with her life. She did not forget... I have yet to encounter a single birthmother who has... and she suffered twenty-one years of guilt, worry, pain and anguish, before finally reuniting with her birthson who chose to search for her, with the support of his adoptive parents.

Finally, I am a state-certified Confidential Intermediary and it has been my extreme honor, both in that capacity and as a research volunteer for nearly 10 years, to assist birthparents, adult adoptees, and adoptive parents (on behalf of their minor children), to reunite with one another. Of the several hundred contacts with which I've been involved, I am thrilled to report that the vast majority – better than 90% – are positively received, and result in ongoing communication and information-sharing, both in terms of medical history and genealogy.

In most cases, strong relationships can and do develop, often leading to lifelong friendships. Even in those cases where subsequent contact is not desired (which can be expressed during an initial, discreet contact), nearly all adoptees and birthparents report a sense of closure, and relief that their willingness for contact has finally been conveyed to their birthfamily member, regardless of the outcome.

In addition, nearly every adoptee I have worked with has reported a deeper sense of connection to their *adoptive parents* after searching and reuniting with birthfamily members. Resolving issues of identity, being treated as responsible and reasonable adults, and receiving fair and equal treatment under the law is exceptionally empowering, but rarely experienced by adoptees in the "Closed Era."

Obtaining an Original Birth Certificate will not necessarily lead to contact with birthfamily members, but will simply provide adult adoptees the same basic civil right to access their birth information, without restriction or penalty, as currently enjoyed not only by their non-adopted peers, but by those adoptees from both the pre-1945 and post-1980 eras.

Indicating, by means of a simple stamp, that the document is not an "active birth certificate," thwarts any possible identity fraud, and is a fair, reasonable, and exceptionally low-cost solution.

The inclusion of a contact preference form, to give adoptees a birthparent's perspective regarding contact, is an excellent idea, provided it does not lead to infringement on their basic right of access to the certificate itself. And we are encouraged by the fact that few birthparents in other states utilize a contact preference form to indicate that they would not welcome contact; in most cases they express their willingness for contact, either directly or through an intermediary.

In closing, I appreciate your time and continued support, and I am willing to be contacted by you or anyone in your office, although it is the voice of the adoptees and birthparents themselves that speak loudest... and they are proclaiming their unified support of this bill!

My sincerest regards,



Jennifer Lengyel-Royal

35443 Glenwood
Wayne, MI 48184
734-502-4091
jlengyel-royal@michigansearching.com
www.jlroyal.com